

No Closure by orphan_account

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Summary:

After Christmas Hawkins gathers for another funeral, while Nancy fights to maintain her composure and figure out her life.

No Closure

Outside, idling on the pavement bathed in early morning fog, Steve sat in his red BMW, fingers poised to ease the key from the ignition. From her vantage at her bedroom window Nancy could see him and wondered why he didn't come to the door. He had been out there for a few minutes already, she had heard the whir of his engine as he had rolled up the otherwise lifeless street to park on the curb at the end of the lawn.

He checked his hair in the small mirror on his visor, combing it back into place with his fingers, before self-consciously touching the knot of his tie at his throat. Nerves, she figured. She had them too. Not like first date jitters, or that tickle in your tummy before your crush kissed you, but jumpy, high-strung nerves.

She looked up the street, where the fog seemed to dissipate at the top of the hill. Her mind was transported far away, the feeling of achievement when Will had come back had been quickly rinsed from her mind which was now stained only with guilt. The guilt which tortured her in day and haunted her in the night.

There was a soft slam and her eyes snapped back to the car below. He was out now, and rounding the hood of his car to stride up the driveway, shoveled of snow, to the front door. She let her gaze wander back up the hill for a moment. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. This wasn't how it was supposed to be at all. She shouldn't be burying her best friend. Not at the tender age of 16. Not when there wasn't even a body to bury.

In the foyer below she could hear her mom making to answer the door. Nancy studied her reflection in the mirror above her dresser, chestnut hair neatly styled under a black hat, a long sleeve slate gray dress under her black grey woolen coat. She smoothed her dress over her hips and the hollow of her tummy, she was thinner now from the worry. It wasn't all that long ago she had attended another funeral. Neither had a body, a real body, but this time there was no hope of recovering the lost.

Eleven had as good a confirmed it, in her own strange manner, Nancy

thought as she slung her bag over her shoulder and descended the stairs. Eleven had seen Barb, had freaked out, had been soothed, and had carried on. Her reaction to Will had been totally different. With him there had been hope. With Barb there had been none.

Down in the front hall her mom had her hand on Steve's shoulder as they exchanged quiet pleasantries. Dad was still asleep on the recliner in the living room and Mike was shut up in his room, possibly also asleep. For a moment she watched the two of them together, she had expected her mother to be much harder on Steve, knowing he was the one who had taken her daughter's virginity. But Karen Wheeler had been nothing but accommodating of their relationship. Maybe it was due to how vulnerable she suspected Nancy was in the wake of her best friend's death.

The creak of the stairs gave her away, and her mom and Steve's attention turned to her. Modestly she bowed her head and came the rest of the way down to join them.

"Do you know when you'll be home, Nance?" Her mom asked as she and Steve turned to leave.

"I don't know, some people may want to do something after or... we may just hang out..." She looked at Steve who shrugged his shoulders only very slightly. "I'll be home for dinner, though."

"Chicken parm." Mom said. "Steve, will you be joining us? You're more than welcome to."

"Thanks, Mrs. Wheeler, but I can't tonight."

"Alright, well..." normally she said 'have fun and be home before curfew,' but that wasn't applicable here. "Be safe."

Back in Steve's car the clock read 7:42 a.m. as Nancy settled into the passenger seat. "Thanks for picking me up." She said.

Steve pulled away from the curb and drove up the hill. "No problem."

A long silence ensued, there was nothing to say, nothing that felt appropriate anyhow. They drove the old familiar way out of the neighborhood, a route she must have taken hundreds if not thousands

of times growing up in her parent's home. The silence made her pensive, observant. Did the Petty's golden lab always sleep at the end of the driveway? Had the Lorenzen's front door always been robin's egg blue or had it been painted recently? The Kyle's had already taken down their Christmas decorations and a rather unspectacular blue fir tree had been cast unceremoniously on the curb outside their house. She looked up to where the power lines traced through the snow laced trees bows perfectly parallel to one another, swinging from pole to pole. Nancy never got over things as quickly as the Kyle's got over Christmas.

"Are you ok?" Steve asked, his question withering before he'd even finished it. "Of course you aren't, I'm sorry." He stopped at the intersection that led onto the main road. "Will... Will Hopper be there, do you think?"

"Probably."

Hopper had been the one to tell Barb's parents of her disappearance. He had also been the one to return later, to report on the investigation and tell them how she had died. Lying came easy to him. Barb had apparently wandered into the woods and been attacked by some coyotes. They were able to identify Barb with her dental records and had found her driver's license in her purse nearby. It wasn't a pretty sight and Hopper didn't think any parent should have to see their child like that. He encouraged cremation and they agreed.

That was the official story, the one Hopper had told them to maintain. They had all readily agreed. What was the alternative - tell the truth? That was impossible. Besides, the lie was kinder than telling her parents that their daughter had disappeared without a trace. If Hopper had told them that it would only give her parents a false sense of hope that one day she could be found. The urn they were burying this morning did not contain Barb's ashes. Barb would never be recovered.

"I - I feel so bad about Barb." Nancy said at long last.

"We all do."

“No, I mean... I feel – I feel responsible.” She kept on her eyes on the powerlines above them, blinking back the deluge.

He turned a corner and she stole a glance at him. His eyes were flitting back and forth and there was a tautness to the corner of his mouth. “There’s no reason you should feel like that. You couldn’t control what happened.”

About to protest, about to explain herself, Nancy stopped. What good would it do? They’d had this conversation before. Steve didn’t see it her way – would never see it her way. He was of the mind that they hadn’t done anything wrong, that they’d done everything they could to save Barb and Will. He was of the mind that they should forget the whole week and pretend it had never happened. Steve didn’t search for answers, Steve preferred to erase the questions altogether. What had happened to him, to them all, was unbelievable and unexplainable; and so he didn’t attempt to either believe it or explain it.

Besides, she knew she would get emotional and she didn’t need to arrive at the funeral, not matter how farcical it was, with a red face and puffy eyes. She could leave that way, but she couldn’t arrive that way.

Pulling down the cuffs of her sleeves so they covered the palms of her hands, Nancy thought she should have brought her gloves.

“I hope this isn’t too long.” Steve said, spotting the cemetery ahead on the right. “I just – I just hate funerals.”

“Everyone does, Steve.” Nancy immediately regretted how harsh it sounded, and attempted to amend her quip. “It means a lot to me that you would come with me today, though.”

“Yeah, I... no problem.” He fumbled.

There was a sigh of momentary relief as he parked and they both escaped the car. The tension had seemed too much in the confines of the small sedan. Out here they had more room to breathe, more room to, well, avoid.

Out at the gravesite folks were already gathering. It was shaping up to be well attended funeral. Far too well attended for an unpopular high schooler. There was a wreath of lilies set up next to her headstone, out of place and exotic in the snow blanketed cemetery. Just as out of place as some of the people who showed up. Sure Barb's disappearance had been a local sensation, especially on the heels of Will Byer's disappearance, and so the funeral had drawn in those who had followed the story. Folks turned up who never even knew Barb, and worse, kids from their school who had sneered at her had come as well.

Barb would have hated it.

With his slightly shabby black jacket, mop of mousy brown hair, and open but unreadable expression Jonathan Byers stood out like a sore thumb, at least for Nancy he did. He spotted her too and there was a moment while he hesitated before he came around to stand with Nancy and Steve. "Hey guys."

Steve nodded his hello as did Nancy.

They stood in a line, facing the grave site shoulder to shoulder, Nancy flanked on both sides by the boys like twin columns. Steve and Jonathan weren't friends, she thought. But their shared experience, no matter how diverse their reactions to it, had brought them closer. There was a silent respect, and she couldn't help but think that her presence in both their lives was a factor of this new-found respect. They respected one another for how they had reacted under pressure, but they also respected one another for how each had looked after Nancy.

The only difference was only one of them knew she was more than capable of taking care of herself.

Nancy hung back more than she thought she would, back behind the initial row of mourners. She was Barb's best friend, sure, but in her mind she had lost her right to stand there. As the pastor delivered his funeral message Nancy thought back on Barb, on their friendship. Nancy had been slightly older, but Barb had been the more mature one. Barb had been an old soul, a frank soul. One could not accuse Barb of being flighty, or fake, or selfish, or spontaneous. She was

constant, slow, careful, principled, and honest. Brutally honest.

And now Nancy would have to be honest with herself, for herself.

She realized she was biting her lip, so hard it was a miracle she hadn't drawn blood or broken the skin. A particularly sharp gust of wind was biting at her cheeks and nose and eyes, and suddenly it was impossible to hold in the tears. Her shoulders shook with the silent sobs that crept up the back of her throat. Sniffling she wiped her nose and eyes on the sleeves still clutched against her palms.

Steve threw his arm about her shoulders and pulled her to himself, but she resisted. This was her thing, she could do this herself. Besides, Barb would have chided her for relying on a boy too much. Biting the inside of her cheek to suppress the sobs, Nancy did her best to listen to the message.

It was nothing original. Nothing out of the ordinary. Barb's mom said a few words, next, which she choked on and were rather hard to listen to. Clearly her mother's heart was broken, that much was imparted to all. And it was equally heartbreak to see such a strong woman brought low. Her father was inconsolable and at the invitation to speak had bowed his head into one hand as he waved away the offer with the other.

The urn was lowered and a prayer was said and the crowd dispersed, as a man in coveralls took up a spade and began his work.

It was impossible to believe it was over, Nancy thought as she blindly followed half a step behind Steve. She would never see Barb again. Ever. Never hear her voice, her advice. Never watch as Barb fought the urge to roll her eyes. Never feel Barb's comforting hand on her arm. She felt alone in all the world. She'd never known life without her best friend.

"Can you take me home now?" Nancy asked as they approach Steve's BMW, her voice a little hoarse.

He turned on the ball of his foot to face her, walking backwards now. "Oh, well –" There was some hesitation and his eyes wandered past her, over her shoulder. "I had planned on meeting some of my friends

for breakfast. I thought we would go together.”

She kicked at a rock in her path, “Honestly, I just want to go home.”

“I understand.” He said, and maybe he really did. She wasn’t sure. “I’ll drop you off first.”

“Thanks.” She looked up at him, but he was still looking over her shoulder.

“Or hey, maybe, -” Then he called out, “Hey Jonathan!”

Nancy turned and watched as Jonathan quickened his pace to join them. “Hey.”

“You wouldn’t mind, uh, driving Nancy home, would you?” Steve rubbed the back of his neck.

Jonathan, for his part, had as unchangeable an expression as ever. It took quite a lot, she knew, to get his emotions to play on his face. “No, no problem.”

“Thanks, bud.” They were almost to the parking lot now and their collective pace had slowed. “I’ll see you later then, Nance.” Steve said and stepped forward to press a quick peck to her cheek.

“Yeah, ok, later.”

Nancy crossed her arms over her chest and fell into step with Jonathan as they cut across the parking lot. Apparently he’d taken his mom’s car, which was only a slight upgrade from his own, which was a second – or even third – hand junker. But he wasn’t embarrassed, or at least he didn’t seem to be, as they watched Steve cruise off in his cherry red Beemer.

“Thanks for coming.” Nancy said quietly while he got the passenger side door for her.

“I – yeah.” He nodded and shut the door after her.

Out on the road he turned the radio on low. It was still early and Hawkins, for the better part, was still cooped up inside, as it often

was during the winter. The snow of a few days ago still lay thick over the ground, and in the foliage of the evergreens. But the snow plows had come and the brown slush on the roads had been pushed to the curbs, ugly and unwelcome in an otherwise postcard perfect wintery town.

“It’s all my fault.” Nancy said suddenly, unable to hold it in any longer.

Jonathan’s eyes shot to her momentarily before he returned his silent attention to the road.

“If it weren’t for me, and my stupid – stupid – I’m so stupid!” She cried. “I’m so stupid, all I wanted to do was just – just get Barb out of there so I could sleep with Steve.” She was too far gone to even be embarrassed. “If I’d just gone with Barb, done what she said...” The sobs were all-consuming now as she pressed her eyes shut and leaned her head against the cold glass of the window. “It’s my fault, it’s all my stupid fault!”

“Nancy? Nancy! Nancy!” There was a hand in hers, resting on her leg. She didn’t move but continued to sob.

“How could this – how could any of this – possibly be your fault?” He asked, his voice loud and strong now. “How could you have known that – that thing would take her?”

“But I could have been with her, at least.” Nancy wiped at her nose to little effect. “I could have protected her.”

“Nancy, no. No. You didn’t know!” He pressed her hand. “You can’t put this on yourself.”

“I can and I will!” She pursed her lips, but the determination didn’t quite reach her doe eyes still watery and red with tears.

“Don’t. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“You were there when it happened. I saw your photos. How was she?”

“Nancy, I’m not going to-“ He withdrew his hand.

She sat up in her seat and tried to find a clean part of her sleeve to wipe her eyes on. “Was she mad, sad, disappointed?”

Jonathan sighed and lifted his eyebrows, “I was too far away to see, even with my lens. Don’t dwell on it. Don’t blame yourself.”

“How?”

“The same way I don’t blame myself for Will. I should have been home that night, and I wasn’t. I should have been there – for him – and I wasn’t.”

“Yeah, but you got Will back.” She quipped, then peered at him.

His gaze was fixed to the bumper of the car ahead of them, but there was a set to his jaw. “Yeah... but still.” He swallowed and took a deep breath, and the cloud over his features passed. “You did everything you could to try and find her, to bring her back. You fought for her and did more than anyone else, Nancy. You did just as much for her as I did for Will, we just... got lucky with Will. You can’t help what you can’t help.”

She licked her lips, chapped and dry, “I guess.”

The song on the radio was low and there was a great deal of static on the station, but it was something. In the still moment Nancy’s hand instinctively found his. Out in the field on their right a solitary tree, gnarled and twisted, rose above the downy quilted expanse. The wind picked up and in a moment the birds lifted from the branches as one, like a black veil.